





Mary, and Other
Poems ✱ By H. H.
Cergrinn



Mary, and Other

Poems



By Th. Th.

Cergrinn



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MARY

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*For an Angel of Death there is,
A terrible Angel of Death,
Who gathers the souls that die
In the bodies that still draw breath.*

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MARY

MARY

I.

Jerusalem ; outside the Hall of Justice. Group of people in discussion slowly breaking up. Sound of a horse approaching at a gallop. A man covered with dust enters, searching anxiously among the crowd. He stops before one who sits leaning against a statue, and lays his hand on his shoulder.

FIRST

Awake !

SECOND

Springing to his feet

What cursed fool is this ! You here !

FIRST

Hast seen her ?

SECOND

It is over.

FIRST

Over ?—How ?

What ? Quick ! I 'm but just come.

SECOND

From Joppa ?

FIRST

Yes. How over?

SECOND

She 's condemned.

FIRST

Condemned? Condemned? My God! The
tale 's true then!

SECOND

True as the judgment 's just. I saw her face
As she swept by us in the Hall. By God
A queen——

FIRST

How looked she? Did she bend
Before the storm? Was she all white—afraid?

SECOND

Not that—I think. White—yes, white ;
But there was firmness in her step, she might
have been
An emperor's concubine. Not as she was, a——

FIRST

Stop !

SECOND

Laughing

Ah, well, you knew her, (*mockingly*,) and you
know they say——

FIRST

Impatiently

The prison ?——

SECOND

Looking at him curiously

Heads of Cæsar have their weight.

Don't be a fool, I warn you. She's not worth it.

II.

A prison in Jerusalem. A woman by a grated window overlooking a portion of the city. Sounds of singing and laughter from a neighboring house.

SHE

Listening

I know them. I could name them one by one.

(A young man enters)

And so you come at last ! I looked for you,
Even in the Court. Half hoped you might be
there ;

But yet, I might have known——

HE

You surely knew
My leaving. Down in Joppa word creeps slow.
God knows I hastened. All has come so fast,
I scarce had time to mount and rush away,
When the burnt Arab devil laughed the news.
I never stayed to smite him on the mouth,
Fearing to be made certain——

SHE

You have heard?

HE

All. All. No doubt, full balancing of lies,
Were the tale thinned. What matter though,
the fact
Is that he 's dead, and you——

SHE

I killed the fool
In a mad moment. I was drunk. The wine
Hot, swelled my hatred of him as the sun
Swells rotten bodies on the desert sands.
Even now—but what of it. You come to me,
You, who have loved me so—you, who forgave
All to me—all. And now!—and now!—Too
late !

HE

It is the same.

SHE

Too late. . . . The Roman?

HE

No.

SHE

So much the better. It is ended then.

Why did you come to me?

HE

I scarcely know.

Perhaps I hoped some mercy in the man,

We helped him once. But e'er I came 't was
done.

SHE

After a pause, aside

He sits there with bent head nor speaks nor
moves.

The only one of all to come to me.

'T is something.

(She goes to him and gently takes his hand)

Ah, your hands are burning hot !
Poor boy. (*Returns to grating*) The moon
makes all things clear as day.
(*To him*) Dost hear the singing? Hark!
Hark now !

HE

Motionless

I hear.

SHE

I should be there to lead them on. Think you
They miss me? . . . Answer, boy. Why, hours
ago

I was their leader. Think you all so soon
They have forgotten me ?

HE

I do not know.

A loud, startling burst of laughter, in which she suddenly joins recklessly and wildly, holding by the bars. He shudders, and, rising, goes softly across and puts his arms about her. She starts and faces him. Their eyes meet.

Peace, dear.

SHE

Aside

This boy's love's wonderful.

So great a love might have saved even me.

(To him suddenly) To-night's the last. Shall
it be one of love?

Look—I am yours. You shall remember me.

Shall say that “of all women I have known
Was not one like her.” In your wife's own
arms

When you shall have her, shall come thought
of me.

*(Throws her mantle aside and seats herself
beside him)*

See, I am yours !

HE

Rising suddenly and pacing up and down

Not that ! Not that ! Ah, dear,
This night will end, and you will leave me.

Dear,
Leave me some precious memory. Oh, my
soul,

The past falls from you as a filthy robe—

I see you only as you are. Oh, God !

I fled away by night to reach the Roman.

SHE

Mercy from him ! Why, I was his——

HE

Hush, dear,

Wrap this about you. I had hoped—but no.
He feared some trick. Beside me—here, be-
side me.

SHE

At your feet—so ?

HE

Beside me, dearest—here.
Talk to me. Tell me something of yourself—
your past.
Oh God !—tell me of anything but now.

SHE

About the past ?—my past ? 'T is like one day
All overcast and dark and deep in storm

With white-hot, zig-zag flashes lighting it.
Ah, dear, my wretched, burning life lies drunk—
Drunk 'mid the debris of a hundred bowls
Filled and a-quiver, once with laughing love—
Drained at a draught.

HE

Nay, love—not that—not that.

SHE

To the beginning? That was years ago.
Nay, not so many. Hot, mad, crawling years.
God! It was he! That face! I could not
help it.

Why, I can feel the night—you think me mad!
You think to-morrow touches me? Poor boy!

(A pause. Suddenly to him)

Think of a little garden by a pool,

Where the moon slept, and distant river things
Sent flying ripples breaking in the ooze.

A dark, cool night after a day of fire.

Far off a wolf breaks out, and near at hand,

Reeds shiver when some swift form pressed
their roots.

You Jews know nothing of that India

Where I was born. You waste your lives to
build

Some sure wealth—some safe refuge for your-
selves.

Owners of things—not knowing ye are owned.

My father was blind Nasha, and a prince.

You look in wonder? I have seen great kings

Waiting his pleasure. He was called the Sage ;

Men came from far to speak with him, and all

He answered in the tongue their lips knew best.

Nasha—Blind Nasha—of all on this earth
He loved me deepest—me the tiny thing
Whose lips the nurse raised to him to be kissed
Each morn—my earliest memory was this,
And nurse's round-eyed awe at sight of him.
Oh, the long hours, and days, and months, and
years,
That slid away, as soft sand from the feet,
While in my garden by the rippling pool,
I listened to my nurse's droning songs,
And made her tell me tales of distant lands,
And of my father!

One I loved to hear
About him. How years gone, e'er I was born—
Swift years had slipped away and I had grown
Into a tall maid, lythe and slumbrous eyed—
How he had gone into a distant land

Far to the West, and with him other two,
Seeking some mystery—*something then to come*.
I knew all afterwards. But then I knew
Only the mystery of love that grew
Into a heat that made my heart so dry
That, at the spark, 't was tinder for the blaze
That rose, as rushes up a forest fire.

And then *he* came! My father had grown old
And weak, and now of days he often came,
With slower steps into my little space,
Sitting beside me silently. His eyes—
Those dear blind eyes I loved to press and kiss—
Fixed on the pool as though he still could seek
From the dark depth some hidden mystery.

And then *he* came! 'T was on a burning
night

Just ending. Dawn came creeping through
the mist,

And, all along, the Eastern sky ran fire,
And sent out steaming, smoky, lurid clouds ;
And afterwards an oval reeking sun
Staggered, a hot-faced drunkard in the sky,
Sleepily crawling from a night of lust.

I still can paint my father on that day.
I can recall his sudden, startled glance,
The bent brows—the quick flash of sightless
eyes,
At the soft words. I scarce could see the face.
Oh God !—that face ! A slight youth—noth-
ing more,
Outlined against the red sky of the dawn,
His head thrown back against the bloody sun,
Hiding the features—a mere fragile boy
Who whispered softly : “ Master, I have come.”

Alas! Our hearts are but worn beds, where
love

Shall trickle first, then murmur, then fling down
His torrent charged with fragments of wrecked
souls.

We know not when the course is first begun,
Until, long after, memory recalls
A drop's swift glisten at the set of sun,
And a faint, distant murmur scarcely heard
Amid the forest sounds of health and life.
So I knew not that aught was changed—that
life

Ran not the same sweet course it ran before.
Or was it tasteless it had been, for now
The very air was burdened with new sense.

Then I was married, and a year fled by.
I left my father. It was all so new

And strange, and full of unexpected things
That, at the first, I scarcely missed his hand.
The kiss, the cool night's unexplained desires,
All things were swallowed in the new strange
sense

Of womanhood—of passion, the intense
New yearnings deep within me satisfied.

They told me that the youth whom I had seen
Had staid beside my father many months,
Talking and learning truth of him, for he,
They said, was wisest of all wise of men,
And highest. He, they said, had taught the
youth

Strange mysteries of life and thought and
truth ;

Re-incarnation and its wondrous strides
Across the past ; the mystery of death,

And that supremest, so they said, of all :
The mighty secret of the body's rise
After cold Death had placed his silent hand.
I listened to it all, but only smiled,
Remembering the red sun at his back,
And the long throbbing night before he came.

Now whether 't was the fatal thing in me,
Working its way, or whether my good star
That led me, I know not, but one sweet day,
When birds and trees and flowers were part
of me,

I begged to be let wander once again
By the dear pool, and pass a score of days
In the old places. I was not yet strong
From my child's birth, and it was granted me.

I came as one comes to a sacred place
Where, yet, the sense of loving worship gives

Pure freedom. Every flower and tree and reed
Bent swift acknowledgment of my return.
And little startled living things crept out
And peered a welcome at me ere they fled.

I turned and *he* was there. My soul fled back,
The throbbing fortress tottered traitorously.
A soft mist flew before my eyes, and his
Looked on me as upon transparency.

I know not now the story of that day,
Or of the days that filled each hour of it.
Love burst upon me as a giant wind
That swept back breath and filled me with itself,
Burning me, freeing me, teaching me anew
True meaning in the most minute of things.

Three days from that I came to him at night,
And crept beside him when he lay asleep.

His warm breath touched my cheek, I caught
his arm

About me—all my being surged to him,
Seeking to bear expression of the pain
My soul was suffering, by the single way
That men had taught me.

Then he half arose ;
The starlight shone upon his face. I drew
Back fearful. Yet I loved him. God ! I loved
As woman never loved a man on earth.
And in those few short moments while he spoke
The words of mercy, that yet drove me on
Into the living death, I loved him so
My very soul ached with the pain of it.
God knows I was not mad ! God made such
love !

She rises and goes to the grating. He

follows, and they stand looking out together.
Dawn is breaking in the East.

HE

The dawn is breaking.

SHE

Yes It is the last.

HE

Repeating abstractedly

The last ! . . . And is there yet no more to
tell ?

SHE

Yes. There is more. Some you yourself can
fill,

Some others. I was soon beyond all trace,

And none had wish to follow. I was free
To work my will. I threw myself on vice
As starving dogs fall upon rotten flesh,
I knew not there was stench ; I hungered so
For something that might bear the shape of
love.

Passion from passion grew, and lust from lust,
Till all things took one way and I was dead,
Long ere the Roman judged me for a crime,
Itself but one more step in the long stair
Down which I had been rushing leap by leap.

*(She leans silently against the grating for
a while)*

I drifted to Jerusalem. Here I found
Romans and natives ready with their gold

To tempt, they thought! Tempt me who
sought out sin

For its own sake! And here once more we
met.

Nay, 't was the last. I never strove again
To tempt him. He was even stronger now
Than when I saw him last. His eyes shone clear
Command of self. The body fell from him—
It almost seemed a soul that moved and spoke.

And yet he had forgiven me, and said
A word of consolation unto me
Before them all, speaking with tenderness
Of *she that hath loved much, and her forgive-*
ness,

And yet one fatal day, at Golgotha,
They crucified him with two common thieves.

LOVE GREW

1000 B.C.

MUTTER of kingdoms that fell ;
Whisper of down-beaten creeds ;
Dread of, and laughter at hell ;
Sobs of an earth that bleeds ;
Chaos, and man its destroyer,
Gasping last throes of the Fight ;
Dull morning light in crushed nations ;
Ages with eyes toward the light.

*And Love—the puny thing—
Lay with upturned eyes,
Unseen the blue of the skies,
Unheeded the sounds that wing.*

A.D.

Morning that slowly unfolds;
Creatures of strained eyes that stare
Dazed onto space, that holds
Light—new soul of the air;
Sodden feet's hesitation;
Sighs and heart anguish out-hurled;
Sudden far voices of birds that twitter
Over a blood-stained world.

*And ONE looked on Love and smiled;
He took the tiny hand,
And the meaning of crosses that stand
Reads only: Behold the Child!*

1000 A.D.

Onward with surging tread,
Myriad millions creep ;
On to the broad light spread.
Lo ! from the Dark's still Deep,
Hands and a Mighty Few,
Walling with turret and tower,
Binding it—hiding anew,
And dull bells clang of God's power.

*Deeper the eyes of youth,
Hotter the temples burn ;
Church—the hag at the loom—
Gilt-spangles the garment of Truth.*

A.D. 2000.

Sudden with lifted head,
Gazing on day unscreened,
Hands that were torn and bled
Staining where walls intervened.
Standing 'mid wreck of the Past—
Rotten bastion and wall—
Glorious Single-Soul hears at last
Rattle of chains that fall.

*Struggling, gasping, ablaze,
The white flesh burning the woof
Love—Love that is Truth—
Flashes to men from the haze.*

DEUS

BLIND God doth creep and creep,
Who, in the moving sea of human hearts,
Might find a dim distorted image of himself.
His deafened ears hear not ;
His nostrils breathe not of the fumes that rise
Up out of torn, crushed things.
His lips taste not
The dew of heavy prayers—they brush unfelt,
Yet, touching, leave a damp upon his brow.
He is but God,
Dumb, chained, immortal, hopeless, hoping God.

OUT OF THE LAND OF SLEEP

OUT of the land of sleep there came

A memory of Pain ;

Out of the land of Life's broad wealth,

Came Pain himself ;

Out of the land of Is-to-be,

Floateth a voice to me,

And the voice doth whisper again, again :

Pain—ever Pain.

HOPING

ALL filled with soft gray mist—not yet the
day

Comes with its sea of brightness that will fling
The dark from interlacing boughs that cling,
Like fretwork, on the crystal river way.

And all my windows filled with Autumn play;
With leaves like little hopes that toss and
spring,

Stiff, trembling, hoping still, yet soon to
swing,

Numb 'neath the mantle of the Winter's sway.

Nor yet the day within, where one poor leaf
Clung drooping, but has fluttered and is gone;

One stray among the myriad million such.
Yet I, who watched its deepening tone of
 grief,
And hunger for the soft sun once that shone,
Have drawn from Death strange knowledge of
 his touch.

LEARNED

I HAVE crept up to see—

Hold back the curtain there,
Let me pass free.

I have passed in to know

Meanings, whose broken sense
Floated up long ago.

Outside the folds I lie.

God, there is silence here!
I have crept back to die.

FROM DARK TO DARK

OUT there, 'mid wind-blown heaps of sand,
And throb of burning suns o'erhead,
At foot of crags, a Silent Land
Lies in a valley, still and dead.

A Silent Land that slopes away
To dim horizons and the dark,
Where moaning winds their mist-shrouds sway
O'er blackened figures drawn and stark.

Yet ever up the steep incline,
From far, appearing one by one,
With staggering step, from time to time,
Come tottering figures in the sun.

Before, the black gigantic walls
With polished surface gleam and burn ;
The sand's hot surge behind them crawls,
And buries those who turn.

Step after step in silent march ;
In silence form by form sinks low—
No cloud in that unbroken arch,
In that eternal glow.

AN EAGLE

O'ER the land of piled-up cloud hills
Doth thy shadow run,
Floating mute in gloomy grandeur
Toward the setting sun.

Never song of lark or linnet
Unto thee may fly,
As thy pinions snatch the sunlight
From the flowers that lie.

Trees arose for simpler singers,
Shade for shyness grew ;
Song fell unto them for solace,
Silent strength to you.

Thou who readest music written
On the storm's white bars;
Hearest throbs of death-loosed spirits
Flashing to the stars,

Hast not felt across thy bosom,
With the sun-clad airs,
Warmer passion-breaths arisen—
Whispered love and prayers?

Thou disdainer of the shadows,
Lingering dim and late,
Canst thou gather from the heavens
Naught but strength and hate?

TWO SIDES

(Without :)

LOW, broken ceiling ; dark ; the day slow dying ;
The woman peering on the still white face,
Silent lying ;
Drawing the cover to its place,
With hand of one not moved of heart to pity—
Here, in the city.

No, not all yet is over—not all yet.
See, a slow breath moveth ! On the cheek
Something gleams wet.
Some word still to speak ?
Nay, nay, what could he say ! Waste not your
pity—
Here, in the city.

(*Within :*)

Sunset. The glorious interlacing light ;
The drifting boat ; the oars that no more grip
The golden water—all the senses slip
With warmth and color from the crooning
night.

No ! From the night ! *She* came up from the
dark

Into the desert soul. Could he but read aright.
There in the dark, her eyes would still bear
light—

There in the dark.

Peace, and the eyes are gleaming over there ;
Shall they not bear the glory of the throne
Into the depths—the soul's—God's very own ?
Now heart to heart across heavy air.

(*Without :*)

The tread of heavy feet ; few words to make
The silence drearier ; forms that halt and
strain,

And slowly take

Their way back to the air from whence they
came.

They follow but their trade. Put by your
pity—

Here in the city.

GROPING

Under the far flung stars ;
 'Mid kelp and the wading grass,
And the flickering flashing bars
 Of the lights that pass ;

Something that floats with the tide ;
 I saw it creep by night,
Then back o'er the shingles slide,
 E'er the coming light ;

Something that hath a plan,
 Dim, and devised in the deep,
Clutching with fingers wan,
 The grasses that sleep.

WAITING

What though I care not that the night skies
sob

 Their stars to earth—

 The end will come.

Or that morn's heaven is all hot with God

 And new light's birth—

 The end will come.

What though blind beggar souls pass asking
aid,

 I turn away—

 The end will come.

Or that she feel not now my warm tears fall

 Upon this clay—

 The end will come.

EN AVANT

AGAIN and again and again

Thou shalt come ;

The myriad lives of men,

In thy turn shalt run.

'Till a window, the crystal souls of all men

In the walls of matter shall be,

And dumb, cold God, from the caverns of Death,

Shall look forth and see.

A PLAYBILL

*" This Night, in the Theatre of the Heart,
A Play for All—Come all Who Will."*

The light dies down ; now, with a start,
Flares up ; my searching eyes fixed still
Catch, in the glow,
New words below.

The broad red capitals unroll

The name : "*The Body and the Soul.*"

*God thought, and the thought was Man,
And Form gleamed out of strife,
And as æons of ages ran,
God dreamed, and the dream was Life.*

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